



PREVENTION TALK

WHAT'S A PARENT TO SAY? TALKING TO YOUR TEEN ABOUT ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, AND OTHER DRUGS

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Do you know the number one reason teens give for not using alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs? If you answered "parents," you are correct. Research shows teens report they choose not to use because they do not want to disappoint their parent(s).¹

According to a recent national survey, youth who had talked with a parent about the dangers of tobacco, alcohol, or other drug use in the past year were less likely to report drinking alcohol in the past month, binging on alcohol, or using illicit drugs than youth who had not talked with a parent.² Parents who develop an open trusting communication link between themselves and their teens help their teens to refuse offers to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. If a young person feels comfortable talking openly with their parent, the parent has a better chance of guiding him or her toward healthy decision making.

REMEMBER:

"Every child in America is at risk of using drugs regardless of race, ethnicity, or economic status."³

Teens and parents often fall into the trap of thinking that everyone is using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. This myth fuels the perception that drug use is a normal part of growing up. Research shows when young people believe "everyone is doing it," the rate of use increases.²

Parents often wonder what to tell their teen when asked the question, "Did you use alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs when you were a teen?" If you are a parent with a history of substance misuse or abuse, you must decide what to share if asked this question. A good rule of thumb is not to share all the details of

your own use, but to focus on your expectations for your teen. Keep your answer short and concise.¹ Share knowledge you have about the effects of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs on the growing body and brain. A good website to explore with your teen to gain more knowledge is www.nida.nih.gov/students.html.

THINK ABOUT:

- Everyone is **NOT** doing it (i.e. drinking, smoking, and using illicit drugs).
- Perceived use increases actual use.
- About 59% of the youths surveyed (14.6 million) reported having talked with at least one of their parents about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco or other drug use.²

ACTION STEPS:

- Be a good listener. Listen to what your teen has to say without interruption.
- Give honest answers to your teen's questions. Set a good example by honestly answering your teen. This process will help build trust.
- Educate yourself to the harmful effects of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs on the growing body and brain.
- Visit the SAMHSA family website at <http://family.samhsa.gov>.

For more information call:

SOURCES:

- ¹ Catalano, R.F., Kosterman, R., Haggerty, K. P., Hawkins, J. D., & Spoth, R. (1998). A universal intervention for the prevention of substance abuse: Preparing for the drug free years. In Ashery, R.S., Robertson, E.B., & Kumpfer, K.L. (Eds.), NIDA Research Monograph No. 177: Drug abuse prevention through family intervention (NIH Publication No 99-4135, 130-159). Rockville, MD: National Institute on Drug Abuse.
- ² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2003). National household survey of drug abuse. Rockville, MD: Author.
- ³ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2003). National survey of American attitudes on substance abuse. Rockville, MD: Author.